

st stay'

right to express dissent are essential elements of a democratic society. We as a nation must learn to express dissent decently and within logical limits. We must also get rid of double standards. If we feel that the 8th amendment is a "curse" while in opposition, we must join hands to undo it when in Government. All assemblies must be allowed to complete their terms irrespective of the Government's finishing their tenures or not.

Lets face it, long marches cannot remove Governments. I know it, you know it, Benazir knows it and Nawaz Sharif should know this too. Only a "quick march" can get rid of a Government and that must not happen, as it is unconstitutional.

JUI is the only political force which has remained consistent on this issue. I have tabled a bill in the Senate to amend Article 58(2) B to bring the president's discretionary dissolutionary powers under the consent of 2/3 majority vote in the Senate.

You have been very critical of the lack of "say" of the Senate in national affairs. Why?

The Senate is our upper house. I feel that it is kept out (above) of every important matter. It does not discuss the country's budget, it has no practical powers. The Senate is the true representative of the Federation with equal representation from all four provinces.

If the presidential power to dissolve assemblies are made conditional to Senate's (2/3rds majority) consent, continuity of the democratic process and strengthening the system shall be confirmed.

Just look at the irony of it! When I presented my amendment bill, Nawaz Sharif's law minister opposed it tooth and nail. Then when the tables turned, Mazari's law minister opposed it, while PML(N) senators supported it and it was referred to the Senate's standing committee.

On restoration of the assemblies by the Supreme Court in 1993, the bill was presented again for the 2nd

reading but was once again rejected by the same PML(N) senators, now that they were in power again. The fate of the proposed 13th Amendment hangs, yet again, in the standing committee.

Are you a member of this committee?

(laughs) No. I am a member of three other committees; information, communications and petroleum.

You must be a very busy senator then?

No. Almost all senators have similar memberships.

What exactly do these committees do? Do they actually contribute to the system?

As a matter of tradition the chairman of a Senate standing committee has always been a senator, on the contrary in the National Assembly the concerned minister has been the chairman of the committee. I believe this has been done away with recently and from now on an MNA shall be the head of a standing committee in the NA. The Senate committees have had a record of constructive criticism on Government policies. These are recommendatory bodies only, so I fail to understand why the PPP Government has decided to block media exposure of these committees. Television and radio coverage has virtually stopped and the state-run press also shies from writing about our recommendations.

The chairmen of National Assembly standing committees have facilities now such as office space, a steno each, etc. We don't have these, which makes our task all the more difficult.

Is our politics moving towards a two-party system?

You are confusing alliances with parties. It is true that today we see two major alliances in the political arena, one led by PPP and the other by PML(N). But both are minority parties within the assembly and can only form Governments with the help of many smaller segments and minority parties. This is good for the system. It will keep them in check and make them learn to coexist and listen to one another's point of view.

1 N 200 000